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Skewed history: U.S. intelligence-gathering as a failure

"Warriors of the Night." Ernest Volkmann. Morrow. 443 pages. \$17.95.

Let us give Ernest Volkmann his due. "Warriors of the Night" is sui generis in the field of intelligence literature. I happen to collect nonfiction about espionage, and this afternoon I did a fast review of the 1,200-odd volumes on my office shelves. If anything dumber exists on the subject I could not find it.

Mr. Volkmann, a master in the construction and demolition of straw men, works from a simplistic thesis: American intelligence has been a "long litany of failure," from World War I through Vietnam and Central America. Further, of the foreign policy disasters suffered by presidents Wilson through Reagan, "an astonishingly high percentage of them [involved] intelligence failure." He curtsies in recognition that dumb presidents and others might — just might — share blame. But, alas, for spooks. A few chapters of Mr. Volkmann, and one blames the National Security Agency for the Colts' move to Indianapolis.

Lord knows our spies have gravy stains on their trenchcoats. But what Mr. Volkmann does not seem to understand (he must know better) is that intelligence agencies do not conduct foreign policy or run military operations. A headstrong military commander such as Gen. Douglas MacArthur can scoff at field reports in the spring of 1950 of massive North Korean troop and tank movements toward the 38th parallel, and the clearing of farmers from the border — both clear invasion signals. Since General MacArthur controlled Far East intelligence (the infant CIA had three men in all of Japan) can the lack of warning about the 1950 invasion be laid on the doorstep of American intelligence?

I think not; Mr. Volkmann faults intelligence (not General MacArthur) with a "blunder."

Mr. Volkmann does offer tidbits that are interesting at first glance, but which gradually destroy his credibility. For instance, as an example of the "drivel that passed across" President Truman's desk, he has J. Edgar Hoover reporting that the "Soviet Union had developed an atomic bomb aboard a submarine in 1940."

Mr. Volkmann's story warrants a march to the source, notes. "Hoover intelligence: confidential source." Given the FBI's security role in the Manhattan Project, a mammoth undertaking, could Mr. Hoover have seriously believed the Soviets had constructed an A bomb in the cramped confines of a submarine? To ask the question is to answer it.

This experience (at page 43) prompted close attention to Mr. Volkmann's sources, and to his statements on subjects about which I claim a smidgin of knowledge. As America entered World War I, intelligence consisted of "only something called U1, a State Department bureau that functioned as an informal centralized intelligence agency." Well, not exactly. Commencing in early 1915, Wilson's Justice Department agents read most letters and overheard every telephone call and moni-

tored every cable in and out of the German Embassy. I would call this intelligence. The Wilson papers contain crates of such material.

My eyebrows are raised, and two wars later, when we reach Korea, my hackles go skyward as well, for I find myself being cited as the "source" of a passage so mendaciously garbled that I yelled for my house counsel. This Volkmann anecdote deals with CIA "boom and bang" operations against China after the Communist victory of 1949.

Mr. Volkmann writes, "among its more notorious (and useless) operations was a twelve-hundred man guerrilla 'army' composed mostly of ex-Nationalist Chinese soldiers who carried out raids into China and North Korea."

The guerrilla band of which I wrote (in "Korea: The Untold Story of the War") was composed entirely of Koreans, both north and south. The words "notorious and useless" are Mr. Volkmann's, and they are not supported by the source he cites. (In a footnote, Mr. Volkmann repeats a libel against Hans Tofte, the CIA guerrilla commander, lifted from an author who had to apologize; I suspect Mr. Volkmann and his publisher will hear from Mr. Tofte in due course.)

Mr. Volkmann's previous writings on espionage, in *Penthouse* and elsewhere, have evoked amused chuckles from professionals in the intelligence community. "Warriors of the Night" will solidify his reputation.

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Mr. Goulden is the author of "Death Merchant," about the renegade American intelligence officer Edwin P. Wilson. Among his three books in progress are a dictionary of espionage terms and a biography of Woodrow Wilson.